

July 2004

Subject: 2004 Water Quality Assessment Report to Congress

Citizens of Wisconsin:

Enclosed please find a copy of our biannual report to Congress detailing the status of Wisconsin's waters. This report satisfies Federal Clean Water Act requirements and provides a compendium of information on the status of our waters for you, the citizens of Wisconsin. This report describes how WDNR is working to meet four key goals related to water: implementing the Clean Water Act, preserving the public trust doctrine, maintaining healthy fisheries, and protecting our groundwater for future generations. We have included program descriptions and contact information, as well as recommendations to USEPA and Congress on how the federal government can help our state better carry out the responsibility of implementing the Clean Water Act. It is our goal to do everything we can to attain waters that fully support fish and aquatic life, recreation, and drinking water designated uses, as well as to ensure that the fish you eat is safe and free of contaminants.

This report includes statewide water quality assessment data for lakes, rivers and Great Lakes shoreline miles (2002), as well as updated total Great Lakes shoreline and stream miles and lake acres calculated using the most current technology available. From this analysis, it is clear that great progress has been made in restoring the integrity of our waters. Point sources have been and continue to be managed and significant progress has been made in developing a framework to improve management of nonpoint sources. In addition, significant policy initiatives designed to better protect groundwater and sensitive surface waters, such as outstanding resource waters, and to better address the special needs of the Great Lakes Ecosystem have been sponsored by the Governor. The new groundwater legislation will protect sensitive resources from excessive consumptive use, while a new Great Lakes Office will focus resources on one of our most beloved ecological treasures.

Despite this progress, however, problems continue to limit the use of surface water and groundwater and consumption of fish and other related aquatic life. Contaminated sediment, atmospheric deposition of pollutants, habitat destruction, and the continued influx of aquatic exotics all pose significant threats to our waters. Some land management activities or poorly planned development also negatively affect surface water and groundwater quality and quantity.

Today's water management issues are complex and cannot be addressed by any single entity acting alone. Whether the goal is to reduce phosphorus or mercury, protect critical habitat or prevent introduction of exotics, we need strategies designed by and for coalitions of partners — government, industry, advocacy interests and individual citizens. For success, these efforts need to be coordinated and integrated using a hydrologic and culturally inclusive orientation: the Watershed Approach.

Please use this report to help determine the status of waters that interest you. By familiarizing yourself with existing conditions and problems, you can help identify and carry out solutions. We *can* resolve remaining problems and prevent additional concerns by working together. Through sharing common goals for our watersheds, we can restore and protect the unique water wealth that largely defines the State of Wisconsin. For more information about this report, please contact Lisa Helmuth at 608-266-7768. I encourage you to participate in watershed management efforts in your area; everyone's involvement is needed to successfully protect and manage our state's water heritage.

Sincerely,

P. Scott Hassett, Secretary